Yale Family Coat of Arms - Origin and History

The Yale Coat of Arms has a distinct history and evolution. Although it has been subject to embellishment and likely retroactive attribution to strengthen pedigree claims[11], it has a traceable evolution from the early twelfth century to the present day.

The widely used representation of the Yale Coat of Arms is derived from Yale Genealogy and History of Wales by Rodney Horace Yale.[1]

Notes on Heraldic Elements

- Strictly speaking, a coat of arms refers to the shield alone; titles, mottos, and external ornaments are generally considered separate from the arms.
- **The boar** is a later addition, probably introduced after about 1450. It symbolizes hunting prowess, courage, and martial strength.
- **The netting** over the boar likely implies restraint or control of strength. It does not appear to have been part of the original crest but was added a few decades later.
- **The olive branch** carried in the boar's mouth symbolizes peace. This is a much later embellishment and is unnecessary to the arms.
- **The hat or chapeau** should not be present. While a chapeau might be granted as an honor to a single person, it is not hereditary and should not appear as a permanent element of the arms.
- **The red cross (gules)** represents bravery, strength, and valor.
- **The ermine spots (tails)** adorning the shield are associated with nobility or high status.
- **The crescent** at the center of the cross originally functioned as a cadency mark, traditionally indicating a second son. However, through repeated reproduction over time, this mark has become *fossilized* and no longer conveys genealogical meaning, and thus is best regarded as an unnecessary decoration.

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England

The earliest point in this lineage begins with **Gerald fitz Walter (Gerald de Windsor)**, born about 1075. The coat of arms later associated with him—retrospectively formalized as those of the House of Windsor—likely originated in the mid-twelfth century or later, as part of the broader development of heraldry. [5]

Ireland

This Windsor coat of arms provided the basis for that used by Gerald's son, **Maurice FitzGerald**, during the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland beginning around 1169.[6]

Maurice's son, **Thomas FitzMaurice**, is traditionally associated with the introduction of ermine spots, a conventional heraldic device symbolizing nobility or high status.[7]

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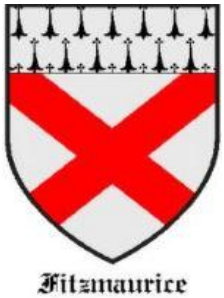
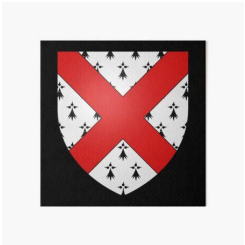


Below, Thomas's son, **John FitzThomas** (d. 1261), added a monkey to the arms, derived from a local legend in which a pet monkey is said to have rescued an infant from a fire.[10]

Wales

Later generations associated with Cors-y-Gedol and Plas-yn-Yale in Wales may not have borne coats of arms in a formal sense. If they did, those arms would almost certainly have been derived from the Irish Desmond arms, as later descendants consistently claimed Geraldine ancestry. A Desmond-style coat of arms—nearly identical in its core elements to the modern Yale arms—ultimately became associated with the family.[8]



Around 1450, **Ellis ap Gruffydd** acquired Plas-yn-Yale through marriage and undertook its reconstruction.[2] While there is no contemporary evidence that his ancestor **Osborn Wyddel** bore a Desmond coat of arms, it is reasonable to conclude that by 1450, a Desmond-derived coat of arms had become firmly associated with the family. However, through his mother, Lowrie, Ellis became the legal heir to the royal claims of the House of Powys Fadog, and to reinforce those claims, he temporarily adopted the Powys Fadog Coat of Arms:

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Still, according to local historian L. Gordon Sherratt, Ellis would likely have placed a version of his paternal Yale family coat of arms over the entrance during the rebuilding.[2]

Ellis ap Gruffydd is a plausible candidate for the introduction of the boar crest, symbolizing hunting prowess, courage, and martial strength. Plas-yn-Yale was then regarded as an exceptional hunting estate, making the choice of a boar both locally and symbolically appropriate.

This would have produced a coat of arms broadly recognizable as the Yale arms of today, though with important differences.

First, the boar would not have carried an olive branch in its mouth; this is a much later embellishment, conventionally symbolizing peace. Second, while the boar is shown standing upon a hat or chapeau, such a feature would represent a personal distinction granted to an individual, not a permanent element of a hereditary coat of arms. It therefore would not be expected in a mid-fifteenth-century version.

John Yale (born c. 1525) is assigned a generic Desmond coat of arms in *Lloyd's Powys Fadog*.[3] However, in a 1954 article, George Yale described this attribution as "quite incorrect," noting that it properly belongs to the South Wales descendants of Osborn Wyddel, not to the Plas-yn-Yale line.[9] A coat of arms derived from the earlier Plas-yn-Yale tradition—rather than the Powys Fadog version—would therefore be more appropriate.

The next firmly datable representation appears in 1616, on the monument erected in Oswestry Church for Alderman Hugh Yale and his wife. As noted by Gordon Sherritt in *Yales and Wales* (1980)[4], this monument post-dates the establishment of the Plas-yn-Yale arms by approximately 150 years.[2] Although the arms are marshalled with those of another family, the essential Yale elements remain clearly identifiable.

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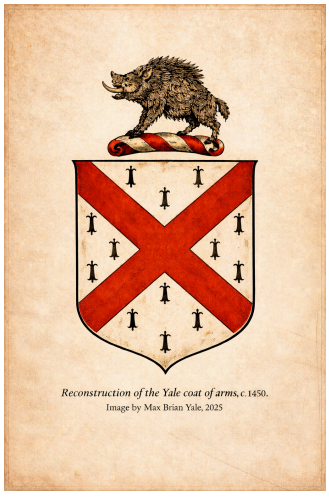
Notably, the netted boar is present, but the olive branch is absent. The chapeau appears beneath the boar, suggesting that it may represent a personal honor accorded specifically to Hugh Yale. Later descendants may have mistakenly assumed it to be a permanent component of the family arms.

In 1821, the coat of arms above the entrance to Plas-yn-Yale was replaced with one carved in stone.

This version likely represents a conscious attempt to reproduce an earlier form, possibly reflecting a version in use by Ellis ap Griffith around 1450. If so, it supports the conclusion that the original arms did not include an olive branch, chapeau, or netting, which is consistent with known medieval heraldic practices. Also, the flourishes along the sides are typical of early-nineteenth-century architectural taste and would not be part of the actual arms.

Thus, the original Coat of Arms from the time of Ellis ap Griffith would closely resemble this reconstruction:



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During the nineteenth century, when the Jones-Parry family resided at Plas-yn-Yale, further alterations were introduced, including an armored helmet and additional ornamentation. These additions are unrelated to the medieval Yale arms and represent garish decorations that obscure, rather than clarify, the arms' original meaning.[9] Unfortunately, this highly embellished version forms the basis of many commercially sold "Yale coats of arms" today.

About 1990, the repoussé copper rendering of the Yale coat of arms shown below was created by **Max Raymond Yale** and remains in the family collection. The work is a faithful representation that reflects considerable patience and care.

Yale Coat of Arms by Max Raymond Yale, c. 1990

References

1. Yale, Rodney Horace. *Yale Genealogy and History of Wales*. Beatrice, Nebraska: Milburn & Scott, 1908.

2. L. Gordon Sherratt Manuscript "Some Account of Plas-yn-Yale and the Yale Family", 1972

3. Lloyd, Jacob Youde William (1881). "The History of the Princes, the Lords Marcher, and the Ancient Nobility of Powys Fadog: And the Ancient Lords of Arwystli, Cedewen, and Meirionydd". T. Richard, Printers. p. 211.

4. Yale, Donald Rodney et al. "The Yales and Wales" San Diego, CA: 2nd Ed. (Privately printed), 1980. Revised from the 1908 work by Rodney Horace Yale. Ref # 3394.

5. Medieval Bandings – The Origins of the Fitzgeralds Part II.

6. Wikipedia - Maurice FitzGerald.

7. House of FitzMaurice.

8. Wikipedia - Earl of Desmond.

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9. George W. Yale, Unpublished paper on the history of Plas-yn-Yale, privately held by Max Brian Yale.

10. Wikipedia - Duke of Lienster.

11. Siddons, Michael Powell. The Development of Welsh Heraldry, Vol. 1, 1991. The National Library of Wales. (See especially Chapter 5: "Retrospective Attribution").

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